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ABSTRACT

If the current state of crisis in education in this country is to be remedied, certain reliable and verified concepts of education must be asserted and maintained. This paper suggests that the core concepts of the social sciences may be learned through exercises involving excerpts from "Great Books." These exercises involve learning the core concept, its definitions, its descriptions, and examples; reading and understanding the selection or excerpt in the context of time and place; and writing an essay to answer questions relating the core concept to the reading. Twenty key terms (core concepts) are presented and sample exercises involving a number of these terms are included. (DB)

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PUTTING BLOOM AND HIRSCH TO WORK: CORE CONCEPTS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

GENERAL EDUCATORS OF OHIO
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"Teaching and learning are not synonymous;
We can teach, and teach well,
without having the students learn."
George Broder, "Constructivism: A Theory of Knowledge"

Rationale

Recent research on the cognition of learning has challenged the assumption that knowledge is directly transmitted, intact and unchanged, from teacher to learner. Instead, it appears that knowledge is built through actions and interactions on the part of the learner with others - in English: Learning is not a competitive sport.

Teachers who are committed to undergraduate teaching need to work collaboratively with each other and their students to refine and enhance the teaching/learning process. Traditionally we have assumed not only the importance but the necessity of education, not only in society, but in defining society. Education is considered one of the major institutions, both in a cultural and social sphere, and as such it ranks up there with the family, the polity, the economy, religion, and the media (about which I will have more to say later). Yet, if education helps create, support, and is a symbol of, our society, then we face a number of dilemmas. What if the society is unjust? Inequitable? What if its ideas are sterile or corrupt? Should education serve to perpetuate a society that needs to be changed and redefined?

These are some of the crucial questions for any of us interested in what may be an educated person. They must be answered before we even start to answer the mundane questions of how we go about doing what we say we want to do. Idealism and pragmatism must come together as a basis for becoming change agents in our society. Change agency is rooted in the knowledges gained from the social sciences. Education is a significant way to apply these social science knowledges to bring about change in the quality of life of all the members of our society, if we really want to. If we don't, then we might as well just go on doing what we've been doing.

Romantic critics have pointed out that most of what we do in our schools is archaic, dehumanizing, and seeks to maintain the structured social inequality of our society. They point out as Kozol has that teachers often start out by seeing themselves as intellectual guerillas, but quickly become more self centered and work to prevent dissonance in their environment. As the State Department has to the best of my knowledge not decided to fund these type of guerrillas through the CIA, teachers will continue to metamorphose into conservative maintainers of the status quo.

Education is power, and whether it is as a confirmation of the existing system or as a mechanism for changing it, that is the way we must deal with it. We are constantly reminded that we, as teachers, have all this power, but do we really understand what that means and the responsibilities that come with it.

Not parenthetically, the responsibility of undergraduate education has changed a great deal since we started teaching the "Great Books." It should be kept in mind in this discussion that colleges have an important a role in negating the influence of institutionalization, routinization, and massification that is the zeitgeist of the last part of the 20th century. At the same time we must eliminate the isolation and elitism that is the natural outcome of discipline based teaching.

There has been several assumptions made by most of the people writing on the topic. They are:

1. there is "something" (the "thing" is used purposefully) that can be called an educated person,

2. there is a body of knowledge that makes an educated person,

3. there is an attitude that makes an educated person,

4. the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills of an educated person can be learned (and by some culturally accepted definition, can be taught),

5. most, albeit not all, persons can learn with the proper "whatevers", if they really want to,

6. the educated person is an intrinsic "good,"

7. the educated person is somehow self-actualized (Maslow would turn over in his grave), and deserves to be envied and emulated, and

8. the educated person is by definition a moral, ethical contributing member of the community.

It needs to be determined whether these assumptions are correct or erroneous, and part of our mandate in the education business is to determine, using scientific methods, if these assumptions are valid or even reliable as independent or dependent variables. I would even go so far as to say that we have purposely ignored the sheer weight of the evidence, even when pointed out by the mass media, that the exact opposite of some, if not all the assumptions are incorrect in at least a significant number of cases as to make the positivistic approach suspect.

One of reasons for the assumptions is the idea that a community of educated persons is a mechanism for achieving democracy, namely rational empiricism; a positivistic emphasis on the individual; support for the instrumental nature of all institutions; voluntaryism; observance of the law (which is natural); emphasis on agreement by consensus in all matters after dissent; and the basic equality of the members of the community. To achieve these ends, formal education has been constructed. But the means to achieve these same ends have never been fully developed with any consideration to anyone except those who make money out of the system.

There has also been a problem in that being educated has been confused with being a scholar, i.e., having knowledges. As a compliment, people who have smatterings of knowledges in several fields are called "Renaissance Men" [sic]; in derision, these same people are called, "jack of all trades, master of none." (The issue of "egg-heads," "grunts," or "brains" as a cultural put down is not simply a function of Spiro T. Agnew's prejudice against "effete eastern intellectuals.)

W. Robert Parks, in an article that we here at the college used to use to teach composition, states that in addition to having self-discipline, objectivity, breadth of interest, humility, mental independence, and a social conscience, the scholar (his words) needs to have the capacity to understand, accept, and wisely guide change; and the capacity to perceive and understand relationships. This is sheer brainwashing!
(Parks, "Profile of a Scholar")

Of course, given the alleged theoretical foundations of modern educational theory, we need to look to Freud to determine the philosophical underpinnings of this schizophrenic neurosis (I don't even care if the good doctor from Vienna is turning over in his grave.) To quote,

> Let us get a clear idea of what the primary business of education is. The child has to learn to control its instincts. To grant it complete freedom, so that it obeys all its impulses without any restriction, is impossible. ... The function of education, therefore, is to inhibit, forbid and suppress, and it has at all times carried out this function to admiration. (my emphasis)
> (Freud, New Introductory Lectures, pp203-4)

Or, if you prefer the neo-Freudian approach,

> The social function of education is to qualify the individual to function in the role he is to pay later on in society; that is, to mold his character

> in such a way that it approximates the social character, that his desires coincide with the necessities of his social role.
>
> (Fromm, Escape From Freedom, 1941.)

I would even go so far as to state that we want to believe these assumptions, because we don't want to question the educational system, the educational institution, educational organizations, associations, and certainly the educational process, i.e., the transmission of learnings (those "things" again!). To do so would call into question Western Civilization and the value (read: greatness) of it. To assume that all professional educators are educated persons is like assuming that unicorns can be stopped by virgins when at least the former is mythical. Another aspect about which I wish to raise the level of consciousness (boy, was Freud right again; is not the raising of consciousness a form of learning?), is the prejudice and discrimination against the uneducated (read: unschooled, in both senses of the word).

We even have prematurely entered the 21st Century with a new term, computer literacy (literacy=educated), which means more than simply reading from a CRT. It can mean everything from familiarity with bits and bytes through understanding "artificial intelligence matrices." (If education = intelligence, then all of education may be artificial.) Minimally this type of snobbery is self-aggrandizing and may even end up with someone getting a bloody nose in a local tavern or at the worse is a form of ethnocentrism and institutionalized racism aimed at those low-lifes [sic] who are unfamiliar with the New York Review of Books.

The credit card affluence of our capitalistic state has exacerbated this issue to the point that I hope there are enough Lean Cuisine apples for all, especially the educators, to sell when the crash really comes. The capitalistic system as private ownership, the profit motive, the free unbounded market, competition, and the thrust toward maximum personal output with the least effort creates tension and an inevitable conflict between the teacher and learner develops.

But follow the obverse reasoning for a moment. What would happen if we assumed that only a very few were educable, and educability was an absolute, that is, there were no gradations of being an educated person; you either were or you weren't. What then would we do in our society that was different. Certainly one would then be forced to look at the so-called classical education of the few and the apprenticeship training of the rest. I am not contending that this is what Bloom and Hirsch are saying, but educators appear to infer this. How much professionalism is there really? Are the physician, the attorney or the persons of the cloth given anything more than training?

On the other hand, the deinstitutionalization of education as proposed by Illich, Paul Goodmann, and others is minimally romanticized nostalgia for what never was and never will be and at best reflects that invidious elitism referred to earlier.

In what appears eons ago, a presidential commission put it simply, if our educational system had been imposed upon us, we would have declared war on whoever did it long ago. But we have no one to blame but ourselves. We are simply not providing quality education for a significant portion of our population because we don't think they are worth the investment. This is not new. The fact is that the history of public education in these United States is the attempt to democratize education without vulgarizing it, but at the same time attempting to maintain the status quo and not disrupt the holdings of the vested interests. The relationship among the power elite, various interest groups, the unions, minority pressure groups, and others have consistently ignored the main object of education, i.e., helping to make the educated person.

Professional educators often have been just as guilty as anyone else with their know-it-all attitude and approach. Certainly their jargon has continued to build worthless walls, rather than building bridges and worthwhile structures. The form education has taken in this country is different than anything that went before it and as such serves a different function. From Thomas Jefferson to the most contemporary reformer, education in a democracy has been the ideal rather than the actuality. Like the weather, everybody complains about education. But unlike the weather, something can be done about it if we will take the time to do what has to be done.

Education in the broadest sense includes the processes and the desired ends of socialization, enculturation, and maturation, the last as far as it can be controlled, which is one of the issues. Much of our common description of what an educated person is revolves around these other aspects, often as through they were directly opposited to direct instruction. We need to be honest and clear as to how much of our educated person is a product of these other things and we must be honest and clear as to how much we wish to try to control these processes. If the goal of asking, "what is an educated person?", is to try to make more of them, then we would want to know the processes that can be changed, if any. By not being honest and clear - and we haven't been - individual freedoms and sense of self-worth become prey to indoctrination, propaganda, and other means of mass persuasion. If one wishes to understand why we and our children are so consumption oriented, one only has to realize that marketing psychology is nothing more than educational psychology with fewer errors.

One specific example of what we are not now doing but should, that of the teaching of cooperation and not just competition. If formal education is to prepare one for life then how does the process prepare one for both cooperation and competition in the world in which we live.? (I would not even raise the question regarding the world in which our national cultural ideology says we should live.) One of the first things we hear once real school begins (earlier in the early primary grades we are told to share) is, "don't look at your neighbor's paper." In fact we are admonished not even to look like we are glancing in that general direction. We are told that teachers do not want to see the same answers on two students papers even if they are sitting on opposites sides of the room. Students may study together, but, again, must have distinguishable results. By the time we reach high school, five kids can copy out of the same World Book and come up with five different reports. The worse part is that they can receive five different grades for their reports even though they have the same information. This convinces them early on that grading by teachers is either random, luck, or a function of them being labeled.

By the time they get to college, they are stealing tests from the word processing pool's waste baskets, buying reports, and joining fraternities to get the tests for the courses where the prof. hasn't changed them in 10 years. Also, by this time students prefer multiple guess tests and hope no one breaks the curve.

One of the more pervasive panaceas of the new education carried over from the late '60s and '70s appears to be student satisfaction. The new formula for this topical anesthetic appears neither to have been submitted to laboratory testing nor is subject to any form of standardization or quality control. Writ large in an undecipherable hand (like a prescription from a doctor - professors in schools of education act like doctors in other ways too), it appears to say students learn best from teachers whose life style or teaching style matches their perception of how life should be. Taking in capsule form (coated to make it easier to swallow), this medicine does not need to be mixed or taken with any content. Enjoying learning appears to have been turned into learning enjoyment without any risk of any sort. Learning by doing appears to have been turned into learning by sympathetic vibrations. This type of Chinese restaurant schooling clearly doesn't help create what is needed to make educated persons.

One wonders whether this is a path of least resistance to what once were the issues of student power and accountability or is a way of insuring womb-like environments that student will not want to leave, thus increasing enrollments and revenues at all levels of formal education.

If we start from Ralph Tyler's assumption that learning, real learning, can be shown as a quantifiable behavioral change, then much of what we seem to be trying to do in education is misdirected. While the goal of maximizing learners' satisfaction is admirable, it must be in the final analysis a by-product of the teaching learning process. Changes do not occur in individuals' behavior unless the desired behavior is made significant for that individual and reinforced. Even then he/she will not change unless the old behavior is negatively reinforced and extinguished.

Thus it is with learning; learning does not take place unless the learner is disturbed and made uncomfortable with the status quo (i.e., the state of knowledge that he/she has). He or she has to be made to understand that with the new learnings he can do something he hasn't been able to do before, i.e., he has power. He must be made to understand that he has to reach, stretch, and sweat, and reach, stretch, and sweat some more. Only then can he have power (power= education) that he hasn't had before and we, as the teachers and parents of the educated person-to-be must do everything we can do to empower him. And power is like love, the more you give the more you have.

Introduction

First I thought it was me; getting old or rigid. Then I thought it was them; stupid, lazy or TV'ed out. Now I think it was both of us and the curriculum too. In fact, the words of the 60's and 70's haunt me more now than ever: "We need to make learning relevant." The problem was that we never asked what was relevant; we assumed and we all know what that means. In this case, not only wasn't the curriculum relevant, but we lost almost all the good that we had in the so called "classical curriculum."

Education has become a handmaiden of the equivalent of political action committees, sometimes well meaning and honestly concerned about the teaching/learning process, but more often than not, pressing an interest that has little to do with anything besides money. While the argument could be made that this isn't new; its impact on the educational process has never been as great. From parents to cable companies to accrediting agencies, it appears that education decisions are being made mostly by non-educators. We must in part blame ourselves for allowing this to happen, but crying over spilt milk just waters it down. We need to seize the moment of general discontent with our education system, institution, organizations, groups, and mostly, with the educational process and change.

Writers like Bloom and Hirsch have given us the flag; let us carry it forward toward a new day in which educators are

responsibly responsive to the needs of the students, the community, the nation, and the goals and mission of education. If this sounds like a crusade; it is. For without the full commitment, zeal, and devotion of a crusade, we are destined to become a nation of "omegas", and as such could easily fall prey to a form of technologically assisted totalitarianism that has never been seen heretofore. But we have to understand the message clearly. We need to integrate learning and the learning processes; not isolate knowledges from each other and the students and not isolate the students from each other.

Don't get me wrong. I do not agree with everything that has been offered as panacea in the last few years, but there are certain reliable and verified concepts of education that need to be asserted and maintained over the long haul if we are to get out of this morass of mediocrity proclaiming its superiority.

Let me therefore set forth the principles which guided the development of this new curriculum and method of instruction. Here I am using the basic Social Science courses, but after years of teaching foreign language and the physical sciences, I am convinced the same logic and process can be applied in most other areas.

)There is a core set of concepts to any discipline, field, or area.

)These concepts are not just terms; they are ideas that need to be fully understood.

)Concepts from many fields are related, interrelated, and generalizable into ideas for living.

)Concepts are learned through application.

)Application is facilitated if done using the learners' own experiences.

)Learning, that is, the absorption into the repertoire, of the application of the concept, can often be accomplished by demonstrating that the concept is, if not universal, at least pervasive.

)Literature serves this function exquisitely!

The changing social environment demands that faculty interact in a variety of fields to determine the most effective (and reinforcing) delivery of educational services - we are currently wasting too much time, energy, and money. The reality of teaching today is that no one can remain isolated in their discipline. We can start by providing instructional bridges, as in the case of using literature in other areas so

that students can connect!

Introduction to Concepts

What makes certain words or terms core concepts in the social sciences, or for that matter, any generalized field? There is certainly going to be debate, especially for those who lean toward a particular discipline; like psychology wanting personality and motivation or political science arguing for state and ideology, for example.

What is important though to understand about core concepts is that they are more than just useful. They are building blocks. They provide the student, once mastered, and the professional, tools needed to understand the complex ideas of the whole field and they provide a language for communicating about these ideas that can be readily understood. People who understand the term culture in the social sciences would not confuse it with things like opera, classical music, and avant garde art.

The selection of core concepts used here was modified by the instructor from work by Theodore Caplow, Edward Sills, and William J. Goode. As stated before, the ones selected work!

Introduction to Great Books exercises

What makes a great book is not the author, nor its prose, or even its vivid portraits. Books that stand the test of time do just that, they speak not just to a few generations, but have a message that transcends changes in life style. Whether the great writing be Greek, Roman, Elizabethan, Victorian, or contemporary, or at any point in between, it teaches, it informs, it entertains, but even more important, it requires its reader to re-examine something about his/her individual life in relation to his/her community, society, the cosmos, or, after all and more, the self.

Over the ages, certain books have been considered popular, erudite, significant, even sacred or mystical for that time and place. Some even have made "comebacks" or been "rediscovered." While some of these are interesting or strike a sympathetic cord among certain reading publics, they more often than not appear to require either a champion, a great deal of extensionism (to identify with them), or marketing. These are not necessarily great books.

A selection of selections from "Great Books" for whatever reason reflects a great deal of bias. The use of excerpts could be challenged by the purists, but elitism of that sort generally creates not the educated person, but ennui and alienation.

The argument for non-Western literature is beside, and

besides the point; the same criteria stand. Hopefully, the selector has read and re-read the selections with a perspective that goes beyond selfish and parochial interests. One also should be clear that in selecting some and not others, social-economic, political, or moral filters are operative. The issue is not the works themselves, or even what they can teach us about the past, but rather how can they help us survive and prosper in the future without degrading anyone or anything around us, i.e., what they teach us about life itself.

The selection chosen, hopefully, does just that. By interfacing the core concepts of social science with selections from some significant writings, we can look at how others have dealt with these issues. But we are not done after we have simply read, we need to integrate the material learned with our own experiences. Critical thinking about these ideas seems to be best accomplished by answering some probing questions.

The format of these exercises is meant to assist the student in doing so. The exercises involve:

1. Learning the core concept, its definitions, its descriptions, and examples.

2. Reading and understanding the selection or excerpt in the context of time and place.

3. Writing an essay to answer questions relating the core concept to the reading.

For example: Shylock's "Do We Not Bleed" speech in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice might be linked with prejudice and discrimination. The student might then be asked to write an essay on the feelings of a member of a minority group who has been verbally insulted in public.

Directions to the Students

In these exercises you will be asked to read excerpts from one of the "Great Books" and relate it to one of the core concepts of the social sciences. Each assignment requires the student to:

1. review the material from your text on the concept,
2. read the introduction to the excerpt,
3. make sure you understand the working definition of the concept,
4. read the excerpt, and
5. answer the following questions in essay form relating the excerpt to the core concept.

The 20 Key Terms

1. Social System
   and related terms:
   - 2. Function
   - 3. Integration
   - 4. Group
   - 5. Organization
   - 6. Society

7. Culture
   and related terms:
   - 8. Institution
   - 9. Value
   - 10. Attitude
   - 11. Norm
   - 12. Deviance

13. Interaction
    and related terms:
    - 14. Role
    - 15. Socialization
    - 16. Conflict

17. Status
    and related terms:
    - 18. Stratification
    - 19. Mobility
    - 20. Power

SAMPLE EXERCISES

VALUES

WORKING DEFINITION

A value is a conception of what is desirable or not in terms of what is good or bad, which influences the activities of the holder of the value. A value is an idea held by an individual but usually shared and reinforced by one's significant others, which helps determine the choices made about what to do and how to do it by defining what is worthwhile, precious, attractive, or suitable, or not, as the case may be.

EXCERPT INTRODUCTION

As in most Greek plays, Antigone tells us in the first scene virtually everything that is going to happen. Here it is done through dialogue, but the foretelling is often done by the "chorus." The problem presented is that of conflict of values - what is most important; personal safety, the law of the land, devotion to one's brother, or even memories of pain previously suffered.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain filial loyalty in social scientific terms.

2. What happens in a society where this value of relationship does not exist?

3. What would be the nature of a community where this type of relationship guides virtually all interpersonal behavior?

CULTURE

WORKING DEFINITION

The broadest definition of culture is: the total lifeway of a people. Culture is meant to include everything a group collectively gains from those who came before them. Culture is that which distinguishes one society from another.
In our day societies are not homogeneous. Different ethnic and even regional differences exist and persist. Identifiable characteristics of groups are both a source of pride and specialness on one hand and an excuse for prejudice and discrimination on the other.

EXCERPT INTRODUCTION: MERCHANT OF VENICE

In the selections you will read, Shakespeare describes the feelings of isolation and apartness of the Jews living in Western Europe in the late middle ages. Not being permitted to be citizens, vote, or belong to the guilds (unions), they engaged in commercial trading of goods, services, and finance.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe how the characteristics of one group of people today can cause them to be treated in a discriminatory (different and less than others) because of cultural differences.

2. What is the importance of feeling like you belong to a particular culture? What do you do to help you feel than way?

3. Discuss the idea that even if we all looked alike and acted alike, there would still be prejudice.

STATUS

WORKING DEFINITION

Status is a relatively ranked position in a social hierarchy, that is, there are those above and those below a person socially. Virtually all relationships are based upon statuses. Even the rights and obligations of the husband-wife relationship are differentially distributed, partially because of different resources.
Master status, that by which one is known, is often based upon obligation. People are often introduced with reference to a title, such as accountant, teacher, or nurse. The status title gives us a starting point to which to relate.

EXCERPT INTRODUCTION

Eric Blair (George Orwell) describes his status as a police officer in a country that England claimed to rule. He does not appear to be particularly happy with who he is or what he has to do, but feels he must "carry on."

QUESTIONS

1. How does the concept of status help you understand why parents might say: "Do it, because I'm your parent and I said so!"?

2. Explain why privates in the army are told to salute anything that has anything shiny on its shoulders.

3. Describe the meaning of the various parts of the academic regalia; the hood, the tassel, and the stripes on the arms of the gown.

FUNCTION

WORKING DEFINITION

When we think of function in the social sciences, we think of structure. An organization, for instance, has a variety of positions, like president, vice president, supervisor, etc. People occupy these positions (statuses*) and perform the work necessary to get the job done and the work out. They carry out the functions of the organization.
We also need to note that actions can be dysfunctional (negative) as well as functional and either functional or dysfunctional activities may not show up immediately. They may be latent (hidden), as opposed to manifest (clearly visible or apparent).

EXCERPT INTRODUCTION

The selections from Othello describe what appears at the beginning to be a positive friendship, but later clearly is not. Iago and Othello are comrades-in-arms. They appear to be almost equals at the beginning of the play, but soon status inequity appears to create an hostility that ends with murder.

QUESTIONS

1. Can status inequity become a disaster in today's world? Give examples.

2. What are the consequences of inequity between spouses when one of them is the sole breadwinner? What function does a pre-nuptual agreement have in this circumstance?

3. Can educational achievement be seen as dysfunctional in a personal relationship? Under what circumstances (use terms you have learned)?

POWER

WORKING DEFINITION

Power is the probability than an actor in a social relationship will be able to carry out his own will despite resistance. Power in this regard means privilege or deference and prestige or esteem in addition to influence, authority, and brute force. Power is the outcome of the unequal structure of society. But power is somewhat paradoxical, that is, there is some contradiction in it. It is often based on someone willing to allow someone else to <u>have</u> power. It can be an illusion and once challenged may be just as unreal as the emperor's new clothes in the children's story.